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ABSTRACT

This is an in-process report on over 100 English-as-a-Foreign-Language argumentative compositions written by Spanish university students in first and fourth year philology. The project aim was to compare writing development over 4 years in a cross-sectional design. As data were collected, factors other than developmental stages began to appear, such as native language (L1) impact and learning language (L2) constraints. It was decided to study the writers in both the L1 and L2 and then to compare results with similar age American student writers as well as professional Spanish and English writers in the argumentative text typology. Results are presented as global analyses of student writers, analysis of individual student groups, and analyses of the professional writers. Findings suggest that Spanish writers favor heavily embedded clauses more than English writers; they did not require the use of more function words, as originally believed. Interesting transference aspects also surfaced, and it was noted that American college student (junior-year-abroad) writers showed more proficiency in writing than American professionals in comparison to Spanish students and Spanish professional writers. (Contains 12 references.) (NAV)

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L1 Influence on Spanish EFL University Writing Development

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L1 INFLUENCE ON SPANISH EFL UNIVERSITY WRITING DEVELOPMENT

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The aim of this in-progress report, representing a year's work by the Spainwrite team[1] on EFL (English as a foreign language) argumentative compositions written by Spanish university students studying First-year and Fourth-year English Philology at the Complutense University in Madrid, is to present the latest research carried out within the project. We first offer an overview of the general design of the study and then focus on our most recent research on contrastive rhetorics.

The overall aim of the Spainwrite project is to compare the writing development through four years in a cross-sectional design with university students of EFL, all studying English Philology. As the Spainwrite team began to collect and analyze the data, it became increasingly clear that factors other than developmental stages required consideration. As Grabe and Gilbert (1993) and others (Montaño-Harmon, 1991) have noted, L1 background may obscure the findings for L2 student writers. Apart from L2 linguistic constraints, transfer factors -- either linguistic or cultural, or both -- may interact with developmental aspects. In order to isolate L2 constraints and NL transfer factors from aspects of writing development, the Spainwrite team decided to study L2 writers in both the NL (native language) and FL (foreign language) and then compare these results against the written production of American college writers of approximate age and with professional writers in both English and Spanish in an argumentative text type.

Our initial hypotheses were:

1) The compositions of the Fourth-year EFL students will show a higher level of development in syntactic and rhetorical sophistication in both the NL (Spanish) and the FL (English) than the First-year EFL students.
2) The Spanish journalists will write more W per T-U in their NL than the American journalists.
3) The Spanish EFL students will also write more W per T-U in their NL than the American college students in their NL.
4) The tendency of Spanish EFL students to write more W per T-U will transfer to their writing styles in English. Therefore, the Spanish EFL students will produce T-Us with a higher mean-length than the American college Students writing in their NL and than the professional journalists writing in English.
5) The Spanish journalists will write more CL per T-U in their NL than the American journalists.
6) The First-year Spanish EFL students will write fewer clauses per T-Us but more total T-Us than the Fourth-year Spanish EFL students and the American college students.

The final results of the study will have a direct bearing on the content of English language writing instruction in Spain, as well as on the nature of first language acquisition and cultural influences on transfer of rhetorical structure.

I. Design of the study

I.1 Participants

Initially, the written production (45-minute free topic exercises) of the three student groups were collected: 1) 50 compositions written by First-year EFL students of English Language and Literature; 2) 50 compositions written by Fourth-year; and, 3) 45 compositions written by Third-year American college students.

Once the Spainwrite team began to contrast the data from the Spanish students writers with those

of American students, it became evident that we had no way of verifying our hypotheses about which conventions are characteristic of good Spanish argumentation in writing and whether Spanish and English might, in some respect, require different means of structuring information. Nor could we distinguish, in the Spanish university writers, which factors might be produced by linguistic or genre transfer from the NL and which factors arose from developmental aspects of writing. In order to discover which characteristics might be working as models for argumentative writing in Spanish and English, we also included 12 texts written by professional journalists.

I.2 Data collection

The task for the First- and Fourth-year Spanish students in both their NL and in EFL and for the American college students in the NL was: "Write at least 300 words about an invention or discovery that, in your opinion, has significantly changed the lives of people living in the 20th century."

Twelve editorial texts written by professional journalists -- 6 in Spanish and 6 in English -- were collected and matched for topic similarity. The English texts were taken from the International Herald Tribune, (Paris) and those in Spanish from El País (Madrid).

The data collected from the various subjects are reflected in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Data collected

Group	NL	L2
1st Yr. Spanish	50	50
4th Yr. Spanish	50	50
3rd Yr. American	45	
Sp. professional writers	6	
Am. professional writers	6	

II. Analysis

The analysis was designed for two phases:

1) Phase 1, which included initial T-unit (T-U) analysis, Total number of Words (TW), Total Content Word (CW), Total Clause (CL), Total ERROR-FREE T-U, Medium-Length of T-U, and CL per T-U (CL/TU);
2) Phase 2, just beginning, will include such features as initial grammatical contrasts (use of tenses, voice, fronting devices), initial identification of cohesion problems (cohesive ties, etc.), rhetorical structure, and rhetorical difficulties in initial and concluding paragraphs.

After the compositions were collected, criteria were established for the following variables, both in English and in Spanish: the basic definitions for word, content word, T-units, clause, error-free T-unit, and medium length of T-unit. Then the same research steps were followed for each of the five groups:

1. Coding
3. Counting: the categories listed in section 1
4. Statistics: means and standard deviations
5. Linguistic features analysis
6. Rhetorical structure analysis

In the first level of analysis, the texts written by Spanish university students in First- and Fourth-year English Philology were compared to those written in English by native American English speakers. These results were then contrasted with the editorial writing in Spanish and in English of professional journalists.

III. Results

We present three different types of results: global analyses of student writers (Table 2) and analyses of individual student groups, so as to observe the different stages of their development (Tables 4 and 5), and analyses of the professional writers (Table 6).

III.1. Global analyses of student writers

Table 2 shows the results obtained for the three groups of compositions in 5 cross-referenced variables [1].

Table 2: Global results of the Phase I

Group	CW/TW	W/TU	W/CL	CL/TU	CW/TU
Sp. in Sp.	μ= 38.5 σ= 5.4	μ= 18.8 σ= 4.8	μ= 7.8 σ= 1.3	μ= 2.4 σ= 0.5	μ= 7.3 σ= 1.8
Sp. in Eng.	μ= 37.6 σ= 3.5	μ= 14.7 σ= 2.8	μ= 6.7 σ= 0.8	μ= 2.2 σ= 0.5	μ= 5.2 σ= 1.3
Am. in Eng.	μ= 41.6 σ= 4.2	μ= 14.6 σ= 2.3	μ= 7.8 σ= 1.9	μ= 1.9 σ= 0.4	μ= 6.2 σ= 1.8

μ = mean σ = standard deviation

The results for the first variable appearing in the table, Content-word/Total number of words (CW/TW), shows that there was a wider dispersion among Spanish students (both 1st and 4th-yr) writing in their NL than when they wrote in EFL, and also a wider dispersion when compared to the American students writing in their NL. The American students had slightly more content in their essays as measured in total number of content words per total number of words.

The percentage of CW in a composition might tell us something both about the composition and the language it is written in. On the one hand, if compositions written in a given language systematically show a higher level of content words, that could mean that speakers of that language are interested in loading their writing with content; on the other hand, we might interpret that a higher degree of content proves that particular language uses fewer functional words. In this variable, CW per TW, the compositions written by American students present the highest percentage of CW. The other two groups use a higher degree of content when writing in their native language (Spanish) than in their L2 (English). Regarding this last assumption, higher content would also be a matter of ease in expressing oneself in one's NL rather than a feature inherent in the language itself. Samples from professional writers, as reported below, were studied in order to reach a reliable conclusion about the difference in the degree of content in Spanish and English essays.

The results for the second variable in Table 2, words/T-Unit (W/TU) showed that, when writing in English, the Spanish students wrote the largest number of words, both in their NL and in the FL. With this global analysis of the two Spanish groups, the difference between Spanish students

[1] By cross-referenced variables we mean those variables originated by the comparison of two total values.

writing in English and American students writing in English appeared not to be statistically significant. However, when we separated the two Spanish groups (1st- and 4th-Yr), we found that there was, indeed, a significant difference between 1st and 4th-Yr groups in their FL writing for W/TU, thus showing development (see Table 4). Variable number two indicates of the TU mean length. The compositions written by Spanish students in their L1 have longer TUs. This is consonant with the hypothesis we suggested previously, that Spanish might be a language more abundant in functional words and this makes TUs longer. It could also be that Spanish TUs have more CWs as well. Variable 5 (CW/TU) apparently corroborates this but that might be due to the length of Tus written by Spanish writers.

Regarding clause mean length, the results for variable three in the table, Words/clause (W/CL), revealed that Spanish students, when writing in English, use fewer words than when writing in Spanish. Clauses written in the students' first language are longer than those written in the L2. However, American students and Spanish students when writing in their NL, are using the same amount of words per clause. The fact that the Spanish writers' T-units are longer in Spanish, while clauses written by Spanish students in Spanish and American students in English have the same mean length, could be interpreted as a sign that Spanish favours more clauses per T-unit, i.e., that there is more embedding than in English. The results in CL per TU, the fourth variable, supports this: compositions written in Spanish by Spanish students have an average of almost half a clause more than those written by native speakers of English.

The results for variable four in the table, Clauses/T-Unit (CL/TU), showed that Spanish students tend to build longer structures within the same T-unit. That is to say, they use more subordinate clauses in the same complex sentence when writing in their NL than American students writing in their NL. There was a slight reduction when the Spanish students were writing in English, but the native writers of English use even fewer clauses than Spanish writers of EFL.

Lastly, an apparent contradiction appears when we compare the results in the NL writing of the first variable (CW/TW) over the three groups with their NL results for this last variable (CW/TU). For variable one, CW/TW, it appears that the American students have a higher content (41.6) in their NL writing, while for variable five (CW/TU), it appears that the Spanish students do. There are two different reasons for these contradictory results. One is that Spanish writers tend to construct more complex (i.e., more embedded) T-units and thus, they have a higher level of content per T-unit in their NL writing. On the other hand, American writers tend more T-units and thus have less content in each of them, even though they have, overall, more content words in their compositions. The following table shows the means for the number of T-units written by each group.

Table 3. Mean number of T-units, student writers

Sp. in Sp.	$\mu = 22.3$	$\sigma = 9.9$
Am. in Eng.	$\mu = 26$	$\sigma = 7.1$

That compositions written in English by native speakers possess a higher degree of content is also supported by variable six (CW/CL), in table 4, in which we see that clauses have more content.It must be noted here that the use of the T-unit in measuring developmental sophistication of EFL writers is not very reliable if used as the sole unit of measurement (Watson, 1983). Thus, it should be used cautiously and along with other types of measurements.

III.2. Analyses of groups by levels and languages

As the global results tended to hide significative difference among groups, we separated the First-Year from the Fourth-Year Spanish student writers, both for the writing in L1 and in L2. In this way, the development stages become more apparent. Table 4 reflects these data:

Table 4: Comparison of all groups in cross-referenced variables [2]

	L1	L2	L1	L2	L1
	Sp. in Sp. 4th	Sp. in Eng. 4th	Sp. in Sp. 1st	Sp. in Eng. 1st	Am. in Eng.
CW/TW	μ = 38.6% σ = 5.4	μ = 37.5% σ = 3.3	μ = 35.6% σ = 4.2	μ = 34.8% σ = 4.3	μ = **41.6%** σ = 4.3
W/TU	μ = **19** σ = 4.6	μ = 14.7 σ = 2.9	μ = 18.4 σ = 5.5	μ = 13.2 σ = 2.7	μ = 15 σ = 2.6
W/CL	μ = **7.9** σ = 1.3	μ = 6.7 σ = 0.9	μ = 7.8 σ 1.5	μ = 6.7 σ = 1	μ = **7.9** σ = 2
CL/TU	μ = **2.4** σ = 0.57	μ = 2.2 σ = 0.55	μ = **2.4** σ = 0.54	μ = 2 σ = 0.37	μ = 2 σ = 0.42
CW/TU	μ = **7.3** σ = 1.9	μ = 5.2 σ = 1.3	μ = 6.8 σ = 2.5	μ = 4.6 σ = 1.1	μ = 6.2 σ = 1.8
CW/CL	μ = 3.1 σ = 0.9	μ = 2.8 σ = 1.2	μ = 2.8 σ = 0.6	μ = 2.4 σ = 0.5	μ = **3.4** σ = 1.2

μ = mean σ = standard deviation

Regarding the development of Spanish students' writing, we will first analyze EFL progress. All the variables, except words per clause, show that Spanish writers progress from 1st to 4th year. The most spectacular gain seems to involve the first variable (CW/TW). Spanish writers increase the number of content words (from 34.8 to 37.5) and they also become a more homogeneous group in their EFL writing (standard deviation was 4.3 in Ist-Yr and 3.3, for the 4th). There is a slight increase in the number of words per T-unit as well as in clauses per T-unit, which might point to a higher degree of sophistication in syntax. There is also a higher number of content words per T-unit and per clause.

When we compare the results of the 1st-year Spanish writers writing in their NL, to those of the 4th-Year writers, we see that the only important differences appear in the number of content words per total words (variable 1) and in content words per clause (variable 6). All the other variables revealed non-significant gains. In the number of clauses per T-unit, the 4th-Yr remained the same (2.4), which seems to suggest that Spanish student writers begin their academic writing with a tendency for a high level of embedding, and this variable stays the same.

III. 3. Analysis of T-Unit length and CL/TU by group

After using the 6 variables listed in Table 4 for the analysis of the professional writers' essays in English and in Spanish, the Spainwrite team found that a number of the variables we had previously chosen as indicators of developmental stages or negative transfer from Spanish actually did not reveal many significant findings. We, therefore, decided to focus on only T-Unit length (TW/T-U) and Clause per T-Unit (CL/T-U), the two variables that had proved to be the most significant

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[2] All the comparisons of means which proved to be statistically significant except the following:

- In the variable W/TU: Sp. in Sp.4/Sp. in Sp.-1
- In the variable W/CL: None of the comparisons were significant.
- In the variable CL/TU: Sp. in Sp.4/Sp. in Sp. 1
- In the variable CW/TU: Sp. in Sp.4/Sp. in Sp. 1 and Sp. in Sp.1/Am. in Eng.
- In the variable CW/CL: the comparison between Sp. in Sp. 4 and Am in Eng. is significant but at $p < 0.1$.

indicators, with respect to contrastive features of professional writers in English and Spanish. Table 5 allows us to observe interesting differences between the two Spanish groups and between the Spanish groups and the American writers.

Table 5. T-Unit length (W/T-U) and clausal complexity (CL/TU) by group.

Language Group	T-Unit Length (W/TU)	CL/TU
1st Yr. Sp in Sp.	μ= 18.4 σ= 5.46	μ= 2.38 σ= 0.54
1st Yr. Sp in Eng.	μ= 13.11 σ= 3.05	μ= 1.98 σ= 0.37
4st Yr. Sp in Sp.	μ= 18.82 σ= 4.84	μ= 2.44 σ= 0.57
4st Yr. Sp in Eng.	μ= 14.72 σ= 3.94	μ= 2.18 σ= 0.53
3rd Yr. Am in Eng.	μ= 14.68 σ= 2.99	μ= 1.96 σ= 0.40

μ = mean σ = standard deviation

While there is a slight improvement in the T-unit length of Spanish student in their NL from 1st to 4th year, their improvement when writing in English is greater as a group. However, the 4th-Year groups also manifests a greater dispersion, which probably means that some students are improving while others remain at their initial levels. In fact, the T-Unit length of the 4th-Yr students even surpasses that of the American college students, who are more homogeneous as a group of writers.

The other interesting comparative result surfaced in the comparison of the three groups writing in English. For the variable of clause per T-Unit (CL/TU), the Spanish writers begin with a level of complexity (CL/TU for Ist-Yr: 1.98) similar to that of the American students (CI/TU: I.96), while the 4th-Yr Spanish students increase this clausal complexity in EFL writing (2.18) and surpass that of the American students (the difference between 4th-Yr. and the American writers is significant at p. <0.01).

III. Analyses of argumentative texts in Spanish and English.

The argumentative texts of professional writers in both English and Spanish were studied in order to aid us in analyzing the students' essays, i.e., to tease apart developmental factors from those that may result from transfer, either of syntactic patterns or of discourse community conventions. Table 6 below presents the data for the six newspaper editorials in Spanish and six in English, categorized by four variables (global content (CW/TW), content per unit (CW/TU), length of sentences (W/TU) and clausal complexity (CL/TU)

Table 6. Argumentative texts in Spanish and English.

	CW/TW		CW/TU		W/TU		CL/TU	
	SP	ENG	SP	ENG	SP	ENG	SP	ENG
1	43	58	10.5	8.6	24.1	14.8	2.3	2.2
2	40	43	16.3	8.4	41.3	19.6	4.7	3.4
3	42	40	14.7	6.4	34.9	16	4.09	2.04
4	45	45	12.45	7.42	27.9	16.47	3.55	1.94
5	38.2	47	11	8.17	36.63	17.39	3.18	2
6	48.6	43	10.7	10.26	22.1	18.96	2.3	1.96
μ = mean σ = st.dev	42.8 3.69	46 6.32	12.6 2.39	8.13 1.27	31.15 7.6	17.2 1.82	3.35 1.96	2.25 0.56

All the variables showed a significant difference ($p<0.01$) between the Spanish and English-speaking professionals, except variable one, content words per total words. In order to find out if structural differences between Spanish and English existed, in addition to noting that Spanish writers used no significantly greater number of content words than writers in English, we counted the number of function word in each of the twelve professional texts. No significant differences were found in use of function words.

The results for variable two, content words per T-units (CW/TU), showed that Spanish professional texts had significantly more content words per T-units than the English texts. The same was true for the third variable, words per T-Unit (W(TU), the difference being even greater tna the difference for variable two. Spanish writers used a mean of 31.15 words per T-Unit, while English writers used only 17.2. the results of clauses per T-Unit (CL/T-U), variable four, showed that the Spanish texts had more embedding than did the English texts.

IV. Discussion

Analysis of the First Phase showed that hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 proved to be correct. Hypothesis two stated that the Spanish journalists would write more words per T-Unit in their NL than the American journalists. This hypothesis proved to be true, the mean scores for the variable W/TU, showing the greatest difference between Spanish and English scores: Spanish texts had a mean score of 31.5 words per T-Unit while the English texts had only 17.5 words per T-Unit. These results corroborated the findings for the student NL compositions as well (hypothesis 3). In the students' texts the W/TU was a very significant indicator of different (elaborate) rhetorical preferences for Spanish as compared to English: 1st-yr and 4th-yr Spanish students writing in their NL produced more W/T-U than the American students (18.8 W/TU versus 14.6 for the American students), and more than even the professional writers in English, who produced 17.2 W/TU.

It is not yet absolutely clear if such data indicate greater preference for elaboration on the part of Spanish writers, since the sample of professional writers was too small to make generalizations (12 texts). However, when findings for the W/TU variable are related to the CL/TU variable (3.35 CL/TU for Spanish and 2.25, for English texts), the results seem to indicate that the Spanish, as a language, favours heavily embedded clauses, causing the T-Units to be longer, i.e. more words per T-Unit.

The results for these two variables cast doubt on one of our initial assumptions about structural differences between Spanish and English. We had supposed that Spanish might show more words per T-Unit because it requires more function words. A count of the function words in the

professional texts proved that Spanish writers did not require the use of more function words in their texts. Thus, we conclude that the greater number of words per T-unit must be a result of the heavy embedding patterns in Spanish, while English favours shorter T-units. This was corroborated by a study of the verbal patterns in the professional texts. The study shows that main verbs in Spanish sometime have four or five dependent verbs, often infinitival.

Hypothesis 1 was incorrect in that the results showed that 1st-Yr Spanish EFL writers did not produce more T-units (μ= 24.2) than the American student writers (μ= 26), although they did produce more than the 4th-Yr Spanish EFL writers. However, the results for NL writing shows an odd developmental pattern. It appears that in their NL, Spanish writers did not continue to develop, as measured in Words per T-Unit and Clauses per T-unit (Table 4). Our assumption is that this lack of development may be due to the fact that the Spanish EFL writers are students of English Philology and therefore, read and write in English more than in their native language.

As for developmental aspects, when we compared the 1st-Yr with 4th-Yr Spanish writers, some interesting transference aspects surfaced. Part of hypothesis 4 was that the tendency of Spanish EFL students to write more W/TU would transfer to their writing styles in English. Transfer seems to be confirmed for both words per T-unit, --where both 1st-Yr and 4th-Yr Spanish writers wrote more words in English that did the American student writers-- and for clauses per T-Unit. This last variable appears to manifest the transfer of embedding patterns from Spanish to English writing on the part of the Spanish student writers. In Table 5 we saw that the 4th-Yr Spanish students increase clausal complexity in their EFL writing and surpass that of the American students. From these data, we deduce that while the First-Yr students are probably hampered in their attempts to construct more elaborate clauses by linguistic constraints, the 4th year students, once more skilled at English, are able to write very elaborate syntactic constructions. This seems to indicate that when Spanish writers are more skilled in EFL they can transfer writing patterns -- at least the syntactic ones -- from Spanish to English.

It is interesting to note also that the Spanish student writers become *less* disperse as a group, from 1st to 4th -Yr, when writing in their NL (a dispersion of 3.05 for 1st-Yr and 3.94 for 4th-Yr). However, when writing in EFL, they get *more* disperse (a dispersion of 3.05 for 1st-Yr and 3.94 for 4th-Yr). We concluded that this increase in dispersion in the EFL was caused by the lack of progress in the EFL learning on the part of some students and a great advance on the part of others. Both for NL and EFL writing, the fact that both of the Spanish groups are more disperse than the American student writers seems to indicate that Spanish students have little training in formal writing courses (thus, some developing and others, not) while the American students have. The questionnaires of the Spanish student writers corroborated this lack of training as those of the American students also indicated that they all had had at least *one* university-level writing course.

Another interesting result is that American college students showed more proficiency in comparison to the American professional writers than the Spanish students in comparison to the Spanish professional writers. That is, American college student come closer to the professional model than their Spanish counterparts. This may be due to the fact that American college student receive more formal training the writing than Spanish students. It must also be noted that the American college student constituted a more select group, Junior-Yr Abroad students, and thus may be more proficient than other American students.

The second phase of the project is just beginning. Thus all results must be interpreted cautiously. Much more contrastive work (English-Spanish) is needed before we can come to conclusions about the influence of the NL in terms of linguistic or genre features.

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